

Chapter 8

Improve Organizational Capacity and Quality

Cactus Flower

An essential function of public health is to assure a competent work force for public health and environmental protection and management. DHEC employs a variety of professional staff to perform public health functions, including physicians, nurses, engineers, nutritionists, health educators, environmental health specialists and others. Prevention of disease and enforcement of regulations to protect public health require a competent, experienced work force. Training and retention of staff is a key issue for DHEC. Competition with the private sector puts the agency at a disadvantage in recruiting for high-demand, hard-to-fill positions for which current salary levels are well below the private sector, other Southeastern states, and other state agencies. Funding limitations and unfilled vacant positions also put staff in the position of taking on additional duties with no associated pay increase. Because of fiscal constraints, DHEC operated in 2003 with about 900 fewer employees, including a 30 percent vacancy rate among nurses. DHEC continues to seek improvements in work force competence through training and development of position competencies and career paths.



Training launched for public health managers

Because of retirement options available to state employees, DHEC expects to lose some 350 staff members, many of them management, in the next few years. In anticipation, DHEC's Environmental Quality Control launched a "**Capacity Building**" pilot program designed to develop leaders and prepare for the pending departure of retiring employees. Fourteen managers were trained in February 2003 to become "career coaches" to employees interested in future growth and promotional opportunities. By the end of 2003, 93 employees had begun participation in the project. The state Budget and Control Board's Office of Human Resources recognized EQC for the successful pilot with the first Excellence in Human Resources award. Building on the pilot's success, the Office of Quality Management and the Office of Personnel Services plan to extend this program to all areas in the agency.

Leadership/management opportunities enhanced

DHEC supports staff participation in the Management Academy of Public Health (MAPH) and the Southeast Public Health Leadership Institute (SEPHLI). Both, based at the University of North Carolina School of Public Health, offer opportunities for staff to strengthen management and leadership skills. In 2003, DHEC sent 37 staff to the MAPH and will have eight staff in the SEPHLI. More than 240 DHEC staff members have participated in these unique learning experiences since 1998.

► <http://www.maph.unc.edu/>

► <http://www.sph.unc.edu/sephli/>

Mentoring program

DHEC's Office of Personnel Services provides opportunities to employees who want to be exposed to new work experiences and develop new competencies through mentoring programs. Eighteen people participated in the initial mentoring group, and 46 people have requested to be a part of the current program.

Video conferencing capabilities

DHEC has expanded and enhanced its **video conferencing** capacity to 17 sites and expanded its satellite sites from 39 to 64 sites to include every county in the state, all DHEC district offices and central office. Over the past year, staff has taken advantage of video conferencing and training provided by research and teaching institutions as well as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The agency broadcast abilities now also allow staff to view training and information sessions with expert staff without having to travel to a centralized location.



Ongoing challenges, new approaches

Innovation teams reviewing agency practices

DHEC continually looks for ways to make the best use of its resources. The agency is developing Innovation Teams to look at three specific areas: administration, regulatory and grants. Teams designated throughout the agency will research, assess, evaluate and implement best practices that have worked in other agencies and that would work for South Carolina. The goal is to work smarter, not harder.

Distance learning

Once the agency's Wide Area Network (WAN) is capable of handling increased loads, distance learning over the WAN can be provided, reducing travel and personnel costs.

Additional resources

Capacity Building Project

► (803) 896-8940